

## AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows.

The listing of claims below will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

### LISTING OF THE CLAIMS:

Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A device for treating flat and flexible work pieces ~~[[i)]~~ with a processing fluid, ~~[[i)]~~ the device comprising:
  - i. a processing tank containing the processing fluid;
  - ii. at least one protective carrier ~~[[5)]~~ for ~~holding~~ receiving the work pieces ~~[[1)]~~  
said  
protective carrier ~~[[5)]~~ and being adapted to be received for treatment by a the  
tank ~~[[3)]~~ containing the fluid; and ~~[[ii)]~~
  - iii. a transport system being adapted to convey the work pieces to the tank
  - iv. a transport system being adapted to introduce the work pieces into the protective  
carrier;
  - v. means for transferring the protective carrier together with the work pieces into  
the tank; and
  - vi. at least one means aperture in the protective carrier that permits the fluid to flow  
into the protective carrier ~~[[5)]~~ in such a manner that the work pieces ~~[[1)]~~  
within the protective carrier will not substantially deform and/or shift position  
~~[[,)]~~ after the work pieces (1) have been received in the protective carrier (5).

Claim 2. (Original) The device according to claim 1, wherein the fluid is a wet-chemical or electrochemical processing fluid.

Claim 3. (Currently Amended) The device according to claim 2, wherein the means for admitting the processing fluid in the protective carrier  $[(5)]$  comprises at least one aperture  $[(6)]$  in the protective carrier  $[(5)]$ .

Claim 4. (Currently Amended) The device according to claim 3, wherein the protective carrier  $[(5)]$  comprises side walls and a bottom wall, the apertures  $[(6)]$  being evenly spaced apart and distributed over the side and/or bottom walls.

Claim 5. (Currently Amended) The device according to claim 3, wherein the size of each aperture  $[(6)]$  ranges from 1 to 500 square millimeters.

Claim 6. (Currently Amended) The device according to claim 5, wherein the apertures  $[(6)]$  are provided with displaceable shutters and/or orifice plates for varying the size thereof.

Claim 7. (Currently Amended) The device according to claim 4, wherein the apertures  $[(6)]$  are not provided in the border regions of the walls of the protective carrier  $[(5)]$  or wherein they are smaller in diameter in the border regions and/or they are provided in a reduced number in the border regions than in the central regions for the purpose of achieving an electrical shield relative to a counter electrode.

Claim 8. (Currently Amended) The device according to claim 4, wherein the bottom wall has at least one drain baffle  $[(27)]$  or at least one drain gate.

Claim 9. (Currently Amended) The device according to claim 2, wherein at least one means for creating a difference in the levels of the processing fluid inside and outside the protective carrier  $[(5)]$  is provided, so that the processing fluid is allowed to flow into the protective carrier  $[(5)]$ .

Claim 10. (Currently Amended) The device according to claim 9, wherein the means for creating the difference in the levels of the processing fluid inside and outside the protective carrier [(5)] comprises at least one reservoir [(7)] and at least one delivery system by means of which the processing fluid is circulatable from the reservoir [(7)] to a tank space located in the tank [(3)] and outside of the protective carrier [(5)].

Claim 11. (Currently Amended) The device according to claim 9, wherein the means for creating the difference in the levels of the processing fluid inside and outside the protective carrier [(5)] comprises at least one stationary protective carrier hoist which is associated with the tank [(3)] and by means of which the protective carrier [(5)] is conveyable into the tank [(3)].

Claim 12. (Currently Amended) The device according to claim 9, wherein the means for creating the difference in the levels inside and outside the protective carrier [(5)] comprises at least one protective carrier hoist which is mounted to a transport carriage for the work pieces [(1)] and by means of which the protective carrier [(5)] is conveyable into the tank [(3)].

Claim 13. (Currently Amended) The device according to claim 12, wherein the protective carrier [(5)] is made in at least two parts comprising a bottom baffle and two opposite side baffles which are automatically actuatable and can be opened before the protective carrier [(5)] is lifted out of the tank [(3)], the work pieces [(1)] remaining within the tank [(3)].

14. (Currently amended) A method of treating flat and flexible work pieces [(1)] with a processing fluid in a tank [(3)] containing the fluid, the method comprising the following method steps:

- i. providing a protective carrier at the tank, the protective carrier compromising at least one aperture;

- ii. conveying the work pieces to the tank;
- iii. ~~receiving~~ introducing the work pieces ~~[[ (1) ]]~~ in into a the protective carrier ~~[[ (5) ]]~~;
- iv. ~~conveying~~ transferring the protective carrier ~~[[ (3) ]]~~ together with the work pieces into the tank ~~[[ (3) ]]~~ or disposing the protective carrier (3) in the tank ~~(5); then~~  
~~filling the protective carrier (5) with the fluid in such a manner that the work pieces (1) will not substantially deform and/or shift position; and next~~
- v. treating the work pieces ~~[[ (1) ]]~~ with the processing fluid.

Claim 15. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 14, wherein the fluid is a wet-chemical or electrochemical processing fluid and is supplied to the protective carrier ~~[[ (5) ]]~~ through at least one aperture ~~[[ (6) ]]~~ therein.

Claim 16. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 15, wherein, for filling the protective carrier ~~[[ (5) ]]~~ with the processing fluid, a difference in the levels of the processing fluid is created inside and outside the protective carrier ~~[[ (5) ]]~~, said difference causing the processing fluid to flow into the protective carrier ~~[[ (5) ]]~~ .

Claim 17. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 16, wherein the difference in the levels of the processing fluid inside and outside the protective carrier ~~[[ (5) ]]~~ is created by conveying the protective carrier ~~[[ (5) ]]~~ to the tank ~~[[ (3) ]]~~ or disposing the protective carrier ~~[[ (5) ]]~~ in the tank ~~[[ (3) ]]~~ while the processing fluid is supplied to the tank ~~[[ (3) ]]~~.

Claim 18. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 16, wherein the

difference in the levels of the processing fluid inside and outside the protective carrier **[(5)]** is created by conveying the protective carrier **[(5)]** into the tank **[(3)]** holding the processing fluid.

Claim 19. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 17, wherein the protective carrier **[(5)]** is conveyed to the tank **[(3)]** using a stationary protective carrier hoist associated with the tank **[(3)]**.

Claim 20. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 17, wherein the protective carrier **[(5)]** is conveyed to the tank **[(3)]** using a protective carrier hoist mounted to a transport carriage for the work pieces **[(1)]**.

Claim 21. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 17, wherein the processing fluid is circulated from a reservoir **[(7)]** into a tank space which is located in the tank **[(3)]** and outside the protective carrier **[(5)]**.

Claim 22. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 15, wherein the processing fluid is circulated through the apertures **[(6)]** of the protective carrier **[(5)]**, said protective carrier **[(5)]** comprising side walls and a bottom wall and the apertures **[(6)]** being evenly spaced apart and distributed over said walls.

Claim 23. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 22, wherein the apertures **[(6)]** are not provided in the border regions of the side walls of the protective carrier **[(5)]** or wherein they are smaller in diameter in the border regions and/or provided in a reduced number in the border regions for the purpose of achieving an electrical shield relative to a counter electrode.

Claim 24. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 22, wherein, for filling the protective carrier **[(5)]** with fluid, the processing fluid is allowed to flow through the apertures **[(6)]** in two side walls of the protective carrier **[(5)]** only, said

side walls being oriented parallel to the work pieces [(1)].

Claim 25. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 22, wherein, for filling the protective carrier [(5)] with fluid, the size of the at least one aperture [(6)] is adjusted by means of a displaceable shutter and/or a orifice plate according to the mechanical sensitivity of the work pieces [(1)].

Claim 26. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 22, wherein, for fast draining of the fluid from the protective carrier [(5)] after treatment, the bottom wall of the protective carrier [(5)] is provided with at least one drain baffle [(27)] or at least one drain gate which is opened and through which the processing fluid is allowed to exit.

Claim 27. (New) The device of claim 1, wherein the protective carrier is localized at the tank.

Claim 28. (New) The method of claim 14, wherein the protective carrier is localized at the tank.